

***Amendments to the Claims***

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application.

1. (Original) A bone fixation system, comprising:

a plate having a top and bottom surface and a central axis extending longitudinally between a first end and a second end, said plate having a plurality of openings between said top and bottom surfaces, wherein a pair of said openings are first and second slots positioned on opposing sides of said central axis, said first and second slots each having a width transverse to said central axis and a length extending between first and second ends of said slot in the direction of said central axis, said length being greater than said width; and

a drill guide having first and second guide members extending from a handle, said first and second guide members each having a passage therethrough opening at a distal end of said corresponding guide member, wherein each of said guide members includes an offset portion adjacent said distal end positionable in a corresponding one of said first and second slots against said first end of said corresponding slot, wherein each of said offset portions is configured to space said first end of said corresponding slot from an adjacent edge of a hole formed through said guide member such that a fastener inserted into the hole through said slot is spaced a distance from said first end of said slot.

2. (Original) The bone fixation system of claim 1, wherein each of said first and second slots defines a recess adjacent said top surface of said plate.

3. (Original) The bone fixation system of claim 2, wherein each of said guide members includes an intermediate portion configured to reside in said recess.

4. (Original) The bone fixation system of claim 1, wherein each of said guide members has a slot engaging end extending proximally from said distal end and positionable in said corresponding slot in contact with sidewalls of said slot.

5. (Original) The bone fixation system of claim 1, wherein said plate defines a groove in said top surface extending longitudinally along said central axis of said plate, said groove overlapping each of said first and second slots.

6. (Original) The bone fixation system of claim 5, wherein each of said guide members includes a notched medial sidewall oriented toward said groove when said drill guide is positioned on said plate.

7. (Original) The bone fixation system of claim 1, wherein said first and second slots are positioned over an upper vertebrae when said plate is located on the spinal column.

8. (Original) The bone fixation system of claim 1, wherein:

each of said guide members includes a main body portion extending from said handle towards said distal end, said main body portion having an outer surface extending thereabout; and

said offset portion of each of said guide members has a contact surface positionable against said corresponding first end of said slot, said contact surface lying in the same plane as and forming an extension of a portion of said outer surface of said main body portion.

9. (Original) The bone fixation system of claim 8, wherein each of said guide members has a slot engaging portion extending proximally from said distal end, an intermediate portion extending between said slot engaging portion and said main body portion, said main body portion having a first width, said intermediate portion having a second width less than said first width, and said slot engaging end having a third width less than said second width.

10. (Original) The bone fixation system of claim 9, wherein said contact surface extends along said slot engaging portion and said intermediate portion.

11. (Original) The bone fixation system of claim 1, wherein said distance is 1 millimeter or more.

Claims 12-20 (Cancelled).

21. (Original) A method for securing a plate to a portion of the spinal column, the spinal column portion including an upper vertebra and a lower vertebra, the method comprising:

providing a plate having a central axis extending between the upper and lower vertebra, the plate including at least one slot extending between a top surface and a bottom surface of the plate, the slot extending in the direction of the central axis between a first end and an opposite second;

placing the plate on the spinal column portion with the slot over the upper vertebra;

positioning a drill guide on the plate, the drill guide having an offset portion positionable in the slot against the first end of the slot; and

drilling a hole through the drill guide, wherein the offset portion of the drill guide spaces the adjacent edge of the drilled hole from the first end of the slot.

22. (Original) The method of claim 21, further comprising:

inserting a bone engaging fastener in the drilled hole, wherein the bone engaging fastener is spaced a distance from the first end of the slot; and

applying a compression load to the spinal column portion with a compression tool to position the bone engaging fastener more towards the second end of the slot.

23. (Original) The method of claim 21, further comprising:

inserting a bone engaging fastener into the drilled hole, wherein the bone engaging fastener is spaced a distance from the first end of the slot; and

allowing movement of the bone engaging fastener towards the first end of the slot in response to extension of the portion of the spinal column.

24. (Original) The method of claim 23, wherein the distance is based on a desired amount of extension of the portion of the spinal column.

25. (Original) The method of claim 24, wherein the distance is 1 millimeter or more.

26. (Original) The method of claim 21, further comprising fixing the plate to the lower vertebrae.